

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Fish Weir

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

As the Tuckasegee River flows through the Jackson County community of Webster it flows over a V-shaped line of rocks. Far too carefully placed to be a natural formation, the rocks form one of the most intact remnants of a Cherokee fish weir.

Historically, Cherokee would place a fish trap at the tip of the downstream-pointing V which allowed fish to swim in but kept them from swimming out. Then, they would file into the river upstream, forming a line from bank to bank, and begin marching downstream, driving the fish into the weir, which channeled them into the fish trap.

In recent years, the Watershed Association for the Tuckasegee River has worked with members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to reconnect Cherokee youth with the way their ancestors collected fish. Each June for the past four years, they've brought young Cherokee to the Webster fish weir and allowed them to re-enact the traditional fish harvest.

With help from Duke Energy, Western Carolina University, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Almond family, the kids get lessons in water quality, what Cherokee life was like at the site three hundred years ago and get to file into the river themselves to try to catch fish.

While the fish harvest from the reenactment has often been lacking, the event allows the kids to get and develop their own personal connection with the Tuckasegee.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.